

DRAFT: D. Ellsberg
12/13/62

COMMENTS ON THE STUART ALSOP ARTICLE "OUR NEW STRATEGY: THE ALTERNATIVES TO
TOTAL WAR" - SATURDAY EVENING POST, DECEMBER 1, 1962

Since this article, which features an interview with McNamara, will undoubtedly be examined closely inside the Pentagon and outside for evidence of trends in administration policy, it is worthwhile noting some important discrepancies between McNamara's actual statements in the interview, as quoted, and Alsop's paraphrase of them in the body of the article. At the same time there are some important ambiguities in McNamara's own remarks, ambiguities which are intrinsic to most other administration public statements as well.

instances, Alsop puts decidedly leading questions to McNamara; ~~he-then-paraphrases~~ in the body of the article he paraphrases McNamara's reply as confirming the point of view obviously savored by Alsop, although careful reading of McNamara's actual reply in the interview fails to support this interpretation. The most important case of this concerns the degree of our reliance currently upon nuclear weapons in Europe.

ALSOP: Berlin seems to me to symbolize our great central weakness. We're in far better shape to fight another limited conventional war like Korea than we were. But we still do not really have the "conventional option" in Europe."

McNAMARA: I don't maintain that the balance of conventional forces in Europe is all we would like ~~as~~ it to be. But the NATO forces have been made much stronger -- General Norstad quantifies the increment/^{at}25%. Our own conventional forces have been increased by 45% -- from 11 to 16 combat-ready divisions in the Army, for example. What is more, all 16 divisions are better combat divisions, with more mobility, more airlift, and more tactical air support. So the true increment is greater than 45%.

We have stockpiled equipment for 2 divisions in Europe, and exercises prove that the men for these divisions could be airlifted to Europe in a matter of a week or so. We have a strategic reserve in this country of 8 divisions as against 3 a couple of years ago. Our air power in Europe is at least equal to theirs, and there is on the central front about an equal number of men on both sides of the line.

ALSOP: Yes, but they have much greater reserve power, don't they? Isn't the real difference that the threshold is higher -- that they would have to mobilize and bring up their reserves to gain *strategic* (?) superiority in Europe?"

X McNAMARA: "Yes, they would have to bring up their reserves. But can they? We have a lot of air power in Europe. And we have reserves, too, don't forget. We spend two billion dollars a year on the reserves in the National Guard. I'm not saying that we wouldn't all be a lot happier if we had more conventional power in Europe. But conventional power is only part of the equation, and as I've said, if necessary, we would use all weapons. But if we say that the Western powers are hopelessly inferior, then we are creating another weakness. By any sense of their standards, -- wealth, manpower, ^{resources} ~~reserve-forces~~ -- NATO is, or can be, more than a match for the Communist side."

In the article, Alsop paraphrases this exchange in a way which suggests no difference of opinion between himself and McNamara on the subject. As if McNamara had agreed without reservation to his opening in the interview, Alsop states in what would appear to be a paraphrase of McNamara's views, "As McNamara insists, there is no inherent reason, in terms of 'wealth, manpower, resources,' why this should beso. In all these ways, the Western Alliance ought to be 'more than a match to the Communist side.' But it isn't. In Europe we lack the 'conventional option.' And we are not going to achieve that option in the near future. (Italics added)

McNamara's actual remarks (which allude, among other things, ~~to~~ the possibility of ~~a~~ interdicting reinforcements to the Central front from inside the Soviet Union, while reserves are mobilized in the United States) are in contradiction.

Similarly, Alsop's statement in the article: "If the Soviets make a serious grab for Berlin, we will have to "use all weapons," in McNamara's phrase," (italics added), simply ignores the crucial qualification in McNamara's actual statement: "But there is always the danger of miscalculation. This is why it was important to make clear in a public statement that we mean to defend Berlin and that, if necessary, all weapons will be used for that purpose;X As I've said, if necessary, we would use all weapons." (Italics added)

Again, Alsop ignores the qualification in another statement that he quotes:

"As a defense intellectual put it, 'no matter how you slice it, if we're serious about holding Berlin, we've got to be prepared to go to the nucs.'" (Italics added)

It is clear from the statement quoted, as elsewhere, the intent of the administration ~~to~~ use nuclear weapons if necessary in the defense of Berlin and NATO.

But it is equally clear that ~~that he is not~~ he is not subscribing to Alsop's own flat statements that ~~the option~~ the option of a serious conventional defense does not exist now and will not be achieved in the near future.

If the use of nuclear weapons should become "necessary" in the defense of NATO, how would the United States propose to initiate their use? In classified speeches to NATO preceding ~~the~~ his Ann Arbor ^{address} ~~speech~~ in June, McNamara deprecated both ~~the military decisiveness of~~ ~~the possibility of keeping a war limiting a war in which~~ tactical nuclear weapons ~~when~~ were used by both sides, ~~in Europe~~ and emphasized the destructiveness of such a two-sided exchange and the unlikelihood (though ~~not impossibility~~) of keeping such an exchange limited. Without ruling out U.S. ~~initiation of the~~ use of such weapons

(particularly for "demonstration" purposes, or if their use were initiated by the Soviets) McNamara made it clear that he proposed to rely back up the conventional defense (which he urged the NATO allies to make increasingly potent) primarily by a threat and, if necessary, the use of counterforce strategic bombardment, initiated, controlled and mainly executed by ~~the~~ United States ~~forces~~ strategic forces. In other words, without compromising in any way the position that the United States will neither commit aggression nor wage preventive war, the Ann Arbor speech ~~re-affirms-what-is-again-a-departure~~ affirmed what has been United States declared policy since the founding of NATO: that the United States would respond to a Soviet attack on Western Europe, that could not otherwise be repulsed, by initiating strategic nuclear bombardment against the Soviet Union. What was new in this re-affirmation was the spelling out of the "counterforce doctrine," whose merits were described in the Ann Arbor speech precisely to enhance the credibility, for purposes of deterrence and allied ~~consciousness~~ confidence, that the risks associated with a U.S. "first strike" ~~would~~ in the face of overwhelming Soviet aggression, would be acceptable to the U.S. While asserting that the results of such an initiative by the U.S. would be an "unprecedented catastrophe" (as would be the loss of Western Europe to the Soviets!) and without minimizing the risks that it could be very much worse than that, McNamara did ~~present-~~ recommend NATO reliance upon U.S. strategic nuclear initiative to back up improved conventional forces, in preference to, for example, national deterrent forces.

In this interview, however, McNamara does not allude directly at all to this contingency: U.S. initiation of "controlled" strategic war in response to Soviet attack ~~in-Europe-~~ against U.S. Allies. (his remarks on our commitment to use the "nuclear weapons"-- if necessary -- in the defense of our allies could easily be interpreted as referring to tactical nuclear weapons, although earlier speeches by McNamara make clear his skepticism as to their usefulness.) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

In the interview, McNamara stresses the use of the "counterforce strategy" as a "second strike" ~~capability~~ option." This emphasis might simply reflect a desire to avoid the controversy provoked by the Ann Arbor speech, and to refute those critics who claim that a "controlled response" is only a "first strike" option, having no utility in a second strike. However, McNamara's remarks unfortunately tend to preserve what is already a major popular confusion, the association of "U.S. first strike capability" exclusively with preventive war or the pre-emption of a Soviet strategic attack on the U.S.

ALSO: "As you know, some writers here and abroad have interpreted what you said in your Ann Arbor speech as implying the possibility of the United States' adopting a first strike strategy--a strategy of hitting first."

McNAMARA: "What I said meant exactly the opposite. Because we have a surer second strike capability, there is no pressure on us whatsoever to pre-empt. I assure you that we really never think in those terms. Under any circumstances, even if we had the military advantage of striking first, the price of any nuclear war would be terribly high. One point I was making in the Ann Arbor speech is that our second strike capability is so sure that there would be no ~~xx~~ rational basis on which to launch a pre-empted strike."

This reply, for one thing, gives a misleading impression of the Ann Arbor speech, which had very little in it concerning the problem of retaliating to a Soviet strike on the U.S., and which concerned precisely the possibility that the U.S. would "hit first" strategically: though neither "preventively" (i.e., in the absence of Soviet aggression) nor "pre-emptively". ~~nor strategic or tactical~~

Moreover, even on the subject of "pre-emption" McNamara's comments are questionable, though they may ~~and~~ accurately represent his own opinions.

The assured existence of a capability to "take a full surprise attack and respond in such a way that we would literally destroy the aggressor" does not imply, logically, that "there is no pressure on us whatsoever to pre-empt," and still less does it imply that "there would be no rational basis on which to launch a pre-empted strike." It does imply that the survival of major retaliatory forces does not depend on ~~strategic-or-tactical-warning~~ fast response to strategic or tactical warning, and hence, that pre-emptive capability, or capability to deliver fast attacks against enemy offensive forces on the basis of strategic or tactical warning of enemy attack, is not necessary to an adequate deterrent posture. But McNamara has frequently stressed the importance of objectives in addition to that of deterrence in the event that relatively unequivocal warning should actually be received of Soviet attack upon the U.S. or its Allies (electronic or infra-red tactical warning by itself would almost never be sufficiently unequivocal, but it might supplement critically strategic warning of an unequivocally ominous sort.) It is hardly possible to say now or in the foreseeable future, that there would be "no rational basis" for ~~activating~~ activating decisively upon such evidence or that there would not be strong pressure on us to do so in the interests of such objectives as limiting damage to the U.S. and its Allies, and achieving a strategic superiority favorable to acceptable termination of the war.

It is true that the Soviet posture could change in the future. In such a way as to vitiate both the credibility of a U.S. first strike in the defense of Europe and the usefulness of a pre-emptive despite ~~near-certain~~ near-certainty of an imminent Soviet attack. Alsop's paraphrase of McNamara's views on this question attract comment on two counts: it gives a misleading impression of McNamara's actual statements in the interview; but it is just possible that they come closer than those statements to views toward which ~~McNamara~~ some members of the administration have been tending. As Alsop poses the question in the article:

"Won't the Soviets also achieve a 'sure second strike capability'?" McNamara's answer is surprising and significant. The first part of the answer is, of course, "Yes." Actually, McNamara's "Yes" was in response to Alsop's question in the interview: "surely we must assume that the time will come when the other side will have a sure second strike capability--solid fuel missiles, hardened bases, and all the rest of it." In other words, it is not quite clear that McNamara was saying more than that it is prudent to "assume" that the Soviets will acquire such a capability~~xxx~~. And whether or not McNamara did mean to ~~xxx~~ agree that the Soviets "will" acquire a "sure" second strike capability, the definite opinion that they "surely" will achieve it seems justified neither by experience nor, so far as I know, by current intelligence. (In particular, their recent move to strengthen their offensive force posture by basing soft liquid-fuel missiles in Cuba ~~is~~ hardly suggests a preoccupation with stability or "sure second strike capability").

Alsop goes on to say: "The second part of the